

Preparations for the election had started months earlier when New Hanover voters worked to select candidates and adopt a platform. Black Republicans sponsored numerous meetings to debate the issues, including anti-Russell rallies in which he was portrayed as “against the citizenship of the negro.” In the end, the county Republican Party sent 45 black and 9 white pro-Russell delegates to the statewide convention. In protest, a secondary party convention was held in the county that adopted anti-Russell resolutions to object to the Russell delegation. Local black newspaper editor, Armond Scott, issued anti-Russell articles in his Wilmington *Sentinel* in which he declared that “the negro race has not an enemy greater than this man [Russell].”²⁴

Once candidates and platforms were laid out, all parties began to campaign in earnest. Although both Republicans and Democrats courted the Populists for Fusion, the Populists negotiated a complicated path between both organizations, cooperating with both the Republicans and Democrats at various levels. The Populists merged with Democrats behind Bryan for president, with Republicans on congressional and county candidates, and with some local Democrats in a couple of counties on the state ticket. Marion Butler wrote in his newspaper, the *Caucasian*, that the Populists had “undertaken a delicate yet Herculean task and while we want a genuine free silver man as president of the United States, we wish to defeat as disastrously as possible the Democratic organization in this State.” In response, Democrats relied heavily on race issues when attacking the Republicans and Populists instead of approaching the issues of reform put forth by Fusion.²⁵

²⁴ Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 63; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 433.

²⁵ Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 54-55; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 440-444.

In Wilmington and New Hanover, the parties were still fractured. Anti-Russell sentiment was found in African American newspapers and meetings. Racist rhetoric in local newspapers disparaged Republicans, Populists, and the 1895 legislature for imposing black officeholders on the city and county. According to black editor Armond Scott, the end result of the campaign in Wilmington was that relationships between whites and blacks were “sullen and resentful.” Anti-Russell black Republicans had put aside their dislike for him and backed his election. After the ballots were counted, Fusionists had won the election in the city, county, and state. Only one Democrat was elected to a magistrate position and four blacks were elected to posts.²⁶

Complete Fusion Victory

Again in 1896, the Republicans and Populists were successful in mounting a fusion of their parties to defeat Democrats. Russell was elected the state’s first Republican governor since Reconstruction. As a result of the new election laws, more voters turned out in predominantly African American counties. Although still a factor in the election, the Populist Party suffered losses in overall numbers of voters in the 1896 election as compared to the numbers that turned out in 1894. The primary reason for the decline was Populists returning to either the Republican or Democratic Parties instead of maintaining loyalty to the third party. The General Assembly featured 72 Republicans, 64 Populists, 33 Democrats and 1 Silverite. Among the assembly members were African Americans John T. Howe of New Hanover, W. H. Crews of Granville, James Young of Wake, W. B. Henderson of Vance, Richard Elliott of Chowan, Moses M. Peace of Vance, Edward

²⁶ McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 442-450.